

FastPath 5 Frequently Asked Questions

What Is A FastPath 5?



The FastPath 5 is an Ethernet (TCP/IP) to AppleTalk router/bridge. The software it uses is not only capable of basic routing of TCP/IP from Ethernet to AppleTalk cabling, it can also do quite a bit more.

On one "end" of the FastPath 5 there is an AppleTalk connector. The other "end" will have an Ethernet connection of some type, usually 10base2 (coax) or 10baseT (CAT5). Between those two "ends" is a 68K microprocessor, some battery backed RAM, ROM, and a program stored in the RAM to route TCP/IP between the two network types.

Physically, the FastPath 5 hardware is a small metal box that would fit very comfortably on the average desk. For a Macintosh tower, you could easily set the box on top and have room to spare.

What Can I Do With It?

With very early Macs not having a whole lot of use in today's world, and most later models having some means by which to accept an Ethernet cable directly or with an external transceiver, you might be wondering what use the FastPath 5 could have in today's world.

There are two ways I could think of to use it. First, if you have a Mac (like the Centris 610) that has onboard Ethernet hardware, but you don't have the required external transceiver to use that hardware, or if that hardware is broken, you could still use the machine's AppleTalk (modem or printer) port to get the Mac onto a TCP/IP network.

Secondly, there are a few machines that are modern enough that you could comfortably use them for browsing the WWW or doing other Internet tasks...but they didn't come with any means to accept an Ethernet connection...you could use the FastPath there to connect such machines to your network. Some examples of these machines include much of the "Classic" line and, say, the PowerBook Duo 270C.

There is a third sort of "use" that should be mentioned as well. The FastPath can route TCP/IP to quite a few AppleTalk-equipped Macs. You could use the FastPath to separate the Macs from other network segments.

Why Is There So Little Information Available?

(or, why is this pretty well the only page that exists with information about the FastPath?)

There are a few reasons for this. First, Apple started putting (or allowing the use of) Ethernet hardware

directly *inside* the Macintosh. With machines such as the Centris 610 already mentioned, Apple put an Ethernet controller right on the machine's main logic board. All you had to do was add the transceiver to the outside of the machine...and there you were, connected to the network.

Macs that had expansion busses could make use of Ethernet cards marketed by quite a few different vendors. Any way that you compared the AppleTalk port to an onboard or bus-connected Ethernet card, the Ethernet card would always be at least theoretically able to communicate much faster on the network than AppleTalk ever could. This was setback number 1 for the FastPath 5 as I see it...no matter what, Ethernet onboard or on-bus would always be faster. As machines were upgraded or networks migrated, many FastPaths probably were just forgotten and left to gather dust.

Reason number 2--if memory serves correctly, Shiva was bought out by Intel shortly after the FastPath 5 came to market. Memory serving correctly, Shiva was basically reduced to a software-only operation...producing such things as the PPP stack and dialer for the Windows 3.1x versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer. This alone probably prevented the FastPath 5 from ever appearing in any great numbers.

I strongly believe that #1 above was the main reason that the FastPath and related information are so scarce today. I had the good fortune to meet up with the FastPath 5's designer and speak with him...and I got the feeling that the FastPath was a very short-lived product for one reason or another.

Was There A "Dual Port" Version?

Yes. The "dual port" FastPath was actually two units in one. According to my manual, you bought the dual unit cabinet with one unit already installed. The other would come from another regular FastPath 5.

As of this writing, the model number for the "dual port" FastPath 5 escapes me.

How About The Internal Battery/What If The Battery Is Dead?

The internal battery will eventually run out of power. It is not recharged during normal operation. My FastPath is still running on its internal battery.

What if the battery is dead? As per the battery label in my unit, the voltage is either 3.6 or 3.8 volts. I doubt the voltage is that critical, as there is no clock in the circuit that I'm aware of. The size is mentioned as being "1/2 AA".

You can get exact replacements, or with all the extra room in the cabinet, you might be able to fit other battery types should the original not be available to you.

Why Do I [Seem To] Know So Much About The FastPath 5?

Honest answer: I really don't.

I found my FastPath for sale at a nearby computer store ([Computer Deli](#), to be exact...) on the bargains table. It was nestled in underneath various useless or near useless cards, toner cartridges and books. When I dug it out, whoever took it out of service did at least take the time to put the manuals, packing materials and diskettes with it...all of which pretty much turned out to be essential. For 20--some--odd--dollars later, it was mine and I decided to try and seek out my fortunes with it by trying to set it up so that it would connect my Mac to my Ethernet network.

After finding that the software disks had fallen behind a freezer, I installed them and made backup copies right then and there. I tried to get the FastPath up and running, but when challenged for a password I didn't know what to do. I then took it apart and clipped the leads on the internal battery. That cleared the password just fine, but it also hosed the RAM-based operating system.

From there it took a post to the [sci.electronics.repair](#) newsgroup to get an answer. The answer I got pointed me to the man who led the design team for the FastPath 5. After asking him some questions I revived it. After that I actually had to get it to connect and, well, route. That took some guessing, hair pulling, a few e-mails to the designer, and some RFC-reading before it worked.

So, long story short, I took a class at the school of hard knocks and told myself I would not give up until it worked or I knew a good reason why it would not work.

My Question Isn't Here!

This is very possible, and I am truly sorry if I didn't answer the question you have in this section. ***Before you contact me, however,*** PLEASE make a reasonable effort to look at the other pages that I have put together concerning the FastPath 5 hardware and software. You may answer the question you had with some effort....and remember, I put a lot of time and effort into making these pages...you could take a little time and effort of your own to see if what you want is located anywhere here.

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